National Capital Planning Commission

NCPC File No. 7523

KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
KENNDY CENTER EXPANSION

2700 F Street, NW
Washington, DC

Finding of No Significant Impact

Pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR, Parts 1500-1508), and the National Capital Planning Commission's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, I have evaluated the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Kennedy Center) building expansion project located in Northwest, Washington, DC, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 3.10(64.00)43898; and the Kennedy Center Expansion environmental assessment (EA) prepared jointly by the National Park Service (NPS) and the National Capital Planning Commission. Based on the foregoing, I have determined that the preferred alternative, Alternative C Option 2, will not have a significant impact on the human environment.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to expand the Kennedy Center's existing facilities by adding additional classrooms, rehearsal rooms, event spaces, and offices adjacent to the Kennedy Center. Additionally, the Kennedy Center envisions improving multimodal access to and from the Kennedy Center, the National Mall, the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, the Potomac River waterfront, and the surrounding vicinity.

The project is needed because the Kennedy Center currently has no dedicated classrooms, a limited number of rehearsal rooms, and no dedicated event space. The Kennedy Center offers more than 30 different educational programs in the areas of performance, teaching and learning, partnerships, and career development for young artists. However, with no dedicated facilities, these programs are currently conducted in make-shift spaces designed for other purposes. Multifunctional rooms, such as the Atrium and Foyers, conference rooms, hallways and rehearsal rooms, currently serve as event space, classrooms, exhibition space, and circulation and storage areas.

In addition, there is limited direct bike/pedestrian access to and from the Kennedy Center to the west, or southwestward to the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, the National Mall, and the Potomac River. The only bike/pedestrian access from the Potomac riverfront to the Kennedy Center is provided by a series of crosswalks across F Street, NW and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway (RCPP), approximately 0.25 miles north of the south parking garage. This lack of a direct and convenient path limits visitor access between the Kennedy Center, the National Mall, the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, and the Potomac River waterfront, and creates a disconnect between

the Kennedy Center, which is the United States' living memorial to President John F. Kennedy, and those other presidential memorials found within the National Mall.

Proposed Action

The Kennedy Center proposes to expand the existing Edward Durell Stone building to provide approximately 60,000 square feet of additional space for classrooms, rehearsal rooms, event spaces, and offices. In addition, the Kennedy Center is looking at ways to improve visitor access to and from the Kennedy Center, the National Mall and Memorial Parks (NAMA), the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, the Potomac River waterfront, and surrounding areas. The project falls within the RCPP, which is under the jurisdiction of the NAMA, a unit of the National Park System administered by the National Park Service.

Alternative C, Option 2: Two Land-Based Pavilions and a River Pavilion with River and pedestrian bridge over RCPP. This alternative has been identified as the preferred alternative and will include the construction of two land-based pavilions connected below grade that will be the site for rehearsal spaces, offices, classrooms, lecture halls, and multipurpose space; and a River Pavilion.

Land-Based Pavilions
Under the preferred alternative, Pavilion 1 will have a footprint of 3,300 square feet and Pavilion 2 will have a footprint of approximately 6,200 square feet. Both pavilions will extend approximately 31 feet above grade. A new landscape design of the entire south end of the site will be created and will include plantings that will enhance the appearance of the plaza. This will involve removing a section of the concrete perimeter wall to incorporate the area into a designed landscape, including new reflecting pools. The preferred alternative will require removing a small section (approximately 2 square feet) of the existing building cladding to provide an opening for a projector in the south façade. This window opening will allow for simulcasts of live performances to be displayed on the façade of Pavilion 2. The preferred alternative will also include the addition of a 10-foot high canopy walkway between the existing building and the proposed pavilions at the south end of the West Terrace to gain entry into the pavilions.

The preferred alternative will include a new vehicular entrance to the Kennedy Center on the south end of the site. Vehicles will continue to access the parking garage directly from RCPP on the western side of the site. Buses and shuttles will also be able to access the site from this entrance. Parking for buses and shuttles will be provided in a new parking area in an underground facility.

River-Based Pavilion
The preferred alternative includes a third pavilion (the River Pavilion) which will be located on a floating pier, approximately 6,500 square feet in size, on the Potomac River. The River Pavilion will consist of an approximate 3,900 gross square-foot two-story structure. The first floor will provide interactive learning space which will function as an engaging environment where the public can explore and directly participate in the performing arts. The second floor will consist of a café. The floating pier will also include approximately 1,100 square-feet of open outdoor space.

Under the preferred alternative, the River Pavilion will be anchored by telescoping piles, Seaflex Anchors®, or by a stiff arm system. The Kennedy Center notes that a marine engineer, who specializes in floating pavilions, will design and engineer the River Pavilion such that its hull and

anchoring system will withstand the effects of not only high velocity water flows during storm events, but also sustained impact loads from ice and debris. The Kennedy Center will obtain authorization for use of the river bottom from the NPS. Under the preferred alternative, any damage to the seawall caused by the River Pavilion and supporting structures will be the responsibility of the Kennedy Center.

For the management of the riverfront areas, jurisdiction and further maintenance responsibilities of the River Pavilion will be transferred from the NPS to the Kennedy Center (pursuant 40 USC § 8124). The River Pavilion will have similar operating hours as those of the Kennedy Center (10 a.m. to midnight) and will be open to the public. In the event of extreme inclement weather, Kennedy Center staff will close the River Pavilion or curtail operating hours, particularly during the winter months. The Kennedy Center will outline specific operation procedures for the River Pavilion within an Operations and Maintenance Plan. With the implementation of the preferred alternative, the majority of construction activities and the location of permanent structures will be within the 32-foot clear space between the RCPP and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. No landing or bulkhead to accommodate water taxi access to the site will be constructed.

River Access Option 2 – Pedestrian Bridge Crossing over RCPP
Access to the River Pavilion under the preferred alternative will be by a single pedestrian bridge crossing over RCPP that will connect the south terrace expansion and land based pavilions to the River Pavilion. The steel framed pedestrian bridge will be approximately 140-feet long and 9-feet wide. The bridge will be built to support small, light-duty vehicles (up to about 4,000 pounds) which will be used to carry tools, equipment, trash, catering supplies, and other maintenance materials from the Kennedy Center to the River Pavilion. With the preferred alternative, additional access to the River Pavilion by pedestrians will be provided by a pedestrian connection from the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail to the lower level of the pavilion. This connection will be approximately 120-feet long. The final design of the bridge and trail connection will be approved by the NPS in coordination with other consulting parties. It will be designed within the guidelines set forth within the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), and will be dependent upon approvals from both NCPC and CFA.

Prior to construction of the River Pavilion and associated structures (i.e., pedestrian bridge), pursuant to 40 USC § 8124, the NPS will need to transfer jurisdiction of a portion of NPS administered property and certain air rights to the Kennedy Center. The NPS will transfer approximately 805 square feet of air rights over the RCPP for the pedestrian bridge to the Kennedy Center (40 USC § 8124). In addition, the NPS will transfer jurisdiction for the one support pier for the bridge on NPS property (approximately 5 to 10 square feet). The pedestrian connection (covering approximately 350 square feet of land) from the River Pavilion to the existing Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail will require a construction permit from NPS.

Other Alternatives Evaluated

In addition to the preferred alternative described above, the EA analyzed the following alternatives: 1) Alternative A: No Action; 2) Alternative B: Three Land-Based Pavilions; 3) Alternative C, Option 1: Two Land-Based Pavilions & a River Pavilion with at-Grade Street Crossing.

Alternative A: No Action - The No Action Alternative represents a continuation of the existing conditions, operations and maintenance of the Kennedy Center, the RCPP, and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. The Kennedy Center would not be expanded to the south. Multifunctional rooms, such as the Atrium and Foyers, the Millennium Stage, conference rooms, hallways, and rehearsal rooms would continue to serve as event space, classrooms, exhibition space, as well as circulation and storage areas. This alternative was not selected because it does not meet the project's purpose and need to provide additional classrooms, rehearsal rooms, event spaces, and offices, and to provide a multi-modal direct link from the Kennedy Center to the west or southeastward to the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, the National Mall, and the Potomac River.

Alternative B: Three Land-Based Pavilions - Under Alternative B, the Kennedy Center would be expanded to the south with the construction of three land-based pavilions. As with the preferred alternative, Pavilions 1 and 2 would be connected below grade and would be the site for rehearsal spaces, offices, classrooms, lecture halls, and multipurpose space. Pavilion 1 would have a footprint of 3,300 square feet and Pavilion 2 would have a footprint of approximately 6,200 square feet. Both pavilions would extend approximately 31 feet above grade. This alternative would also include a third pavilion, with a footprint of approximately 6,500 square feet, built on the south side of the Kennedy Center. This third pavilion would provide an enclosed interactive learning space to function as an engaging environment where the public can explore and directly participate in the performing arts. This pavilion would be approximately 15 feet above grade.

Similar to the preferred alternative, Alternative B would provide a new landscape design for the entire south end of the site and would include plantings that would enhance the appearance of the plaza. This would involve removing a section of the concrete perimeter wall to incorporate the area into a designed landscape, including new reflecting pools. Alternative B would also require removing a small section (approximately 2 feet square) of the existing building cladding to provide an opening for a projector in the south façade. This window opening would allow for simulcasts of live performances to be displayed on the façade of Pavilion 2. Alternative B would also include the addition of a 10-foot high canopy walkway between the existing building and the proposed pavilions at the south end of the West Terrace to provide access into the pavilions.

A new vehicular entrance to the Kennedy Center on the south end of the site would be constructed. Vehicles would still be able to access the parking garage directly from RCPP on the western side of the site. Buses and shuttles would also be able to access the site from this entrance. Parking for buses and shuttles would be provided in a new parking area in an underground facility located directly under Pavilion 3. With the implementation of Alternative B, all construction activities would take place on Kennedy Center property.

Alternative B was not selected because it would not fully meet the purpose and need. Alternative B would not provide a direct link from the Kennedy Center southeastward to the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail, the National Mall, and the Potomac River.

Alternative C: Two Land-Based Pavilions and a River Pavilion with River Access Option 1: At-Grade Street Crossing – This alternative is similar to the preferred alternative except that visitors would access the River Pavilion by an at-grade crossing of the RCPP from the Kennedy Center to

the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. Access to the River Pavilion would be provided by a pedestrian connection from the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail to the lower level of the River Pavilion. While Alternative C, Option 1 is similar in scope to the preferred alternative, it was not selected because the impacts to human health and safety would be greater than those resulting from the preferred alternative. The preferred alternative provides safer access from the Kennedy Center to the River Pavilion and the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail. The preferred alternative will also increase the overall connectivity of the area creating a benefit to visitor use and experience.

Standard for evaluation

Under NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, and NCPC Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, an EA is sufficient and an Environmental Impact Statement need not be prepared if the EA supports the finding that the major federal action will not significantly affect the human environment. The EA for this project was prepared in accordance with this standard.

Potential Impacts

Water quality, visitor use and experience, and human health and safety will experience both beneficial and adverse impacts as a result of implementing the preferred alternative. Floodplains, rare, threatened, and endangered species, cultural resources, operations and management, and traffic and transportation will experience adverse impacts as a result of implementation of the preferred alternative. However, no significant impacts were identified that will require analysis in an EIS. Impacts that will occur to the affected resources are summarized as follows:

Water Quality: Disturbances to river bottom sediments and earth disturbance during construction under the preferred alternative will result in short-term negligible adverse impacts to water quality. The use of sediment and erosion controls during construction will be provided in accordance with DC regulatory requirements. Long-term benefits to water quality will occur from the implementation of stormwater practices, such as green roofs and reflecting pools which will use stormwater, which will reduce the amount of stormwater runoff. Long-term negligible adverse impacts will result from the coverage of approximately 6,500 square feet of open water by the River Pavilion. Either option for access to the River Pavilion will have long-term negligible affects to water quality from an increase in impervious surfaces.

Floodplains: The preferred alternative will result in short-term negligible adverse impacts to floodplains due to ground disturbance during construction. The addition of structures will result in very little change to the ability of the floodplain to convey floodwaters and will not contribute to flooding. River Access Option 2 will have short and long-term negligible affects to floodplains, but the River Pavilion will not measurably affect the ability of the floodplain to convey floodwaters or its values and functions, and will not contribute to flooding. The River Pavilion will be designed to the FEMA 500-year flood elevation regardless of the anchoring method selected and the pavilion will rise and fall with the water elevation. It will be designed and engineered such that its hull and its anchoring system will withstand the effects of not only high velocity water flows during historic storm events, but also sustained impact loads from ice and debris. A marine engineer will

model the ice, wind, wave, and water velocity conditions and the results will be used to determine the design criteria for the River Pavilion.

Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Species: The preferred alternative may result in short-term minor adverse impacts to threatened and endangered species due to disturbances during construction from sedimentation. During construction of the land-based pavilions, exposed soils could result in erosion and release of sediments into the Potomac River, which may affect the Atlantic and short-nosed sturgeons. However, erosion and sediment controls and various other BMPs such as silt fencing, sediment traps, and vegetative stabilization will be employed to minimize soil erosion and the release of sediments into the Potomac River.

Cultural Resources: The preferred alternative will result in long-term moderate adverse impacts to cultural resources within the Area of Potential (APE). Under the preferred alternative, the River Pavilion, and to a lesser extent the pedestrian bridge and pedestrian canopy, will interrupt existing panoramic views from the South and West Terraces of the Kennedy Center. The River Pavilion, the pedestrian bridge and the pedestrian connection will have a moderate direct adverse impact on certain contributing resources of the RCPP, including the roadway and the network of trails. The River Pavilion and the pedestrian bridge will also block panoramic views of the Potomac River and Theodore Roosevelt Island from sections of the RCPP and trail.

NPS and NCPC have coordinated the findings of the EA with the DC SHPO in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA through the preparation of an Assessment of Effects report. A Memorandum of Agreement detailing the necessary mitigation and minimization measures will be established.

Traffic and Transportation: The preferred alternative will result in short-term minor to moderate adverse impacts to traffic and transportation because of construction-related delays to build the expansion. After construction is complete, River Access Option 2 will have long-term negligible adverse impacts from the introduction of a connection to Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail from the Kennedy Center. The employee population of the Kennedy Center is expected to remain constant during the project. Since the performances tend to occur during the evening or on weekends and not during peak times, and this project is not intended to attract more visitors, no increase of traffic is anticipated. The addition of the River Pavilion under Options 1 and 2 would result in long-term moderate adverse impacts to the recreational boating and rowing communities.

Visitor Use and Experience: Impacts to visitor use and experience consist of short-term minor adverse impacts due to construction. Long-term beneficial impacts will occur because the expansion will provide new opportunities for free events to the public, new classrooms and rehearsal spaces and a designed landscape that will enhance visitor experience. There will be short-term minor impacts associated with construction under River Access Option 2. River Access Option 2 will provide an uninterrupted path between the Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail and the Kennedy Center, increasing the overall connectivity of the area and creating a new benefit to visitor use and experience. However, long-term negligible adverse impacts to existing users of Rock Creek Paved Recreation Trail will occur.

Human Health and Safety: Impacts to human health and safety consist of short-term minor adverse impacts associated with contaminated soil removal during construction of the land-based

pavilions. The soils will be handled in accordance with an approved site health and safety plan. Once removed a long-term beneficial impact will result. There will be no short-term impacts associated with construction of the River Pavilion. River Access Option 2 will result in short-term negligible adverse and long-term beneficial impacts to human health and safety.

Marcel C. Acosta
Executive Director